

The Harvard University Archives are maintained by the Harvard University Library system and are a great resource to access Harvard's historical records.

"The Harvard Library is the umbrella organization for the Harvard University libraries and their shared services, such as access, preservation, digital infrastructure, digital imaging, and discovery services. The Harvard Library is nearly 400 years old, making it the oldest library system in the United States. Additionally, the Harvard Library is the largest private library system and largest academic library in the world. Its collection holds nearly 20 million volumes, 400 million manuscripts, 10 million photographs, and one million maps. Harvard Library holds the third largest collection in the United States, after the Library of Congress and Boston Public Library. Based on the number of items held, it is the fifth largest library in the United States. Additionally, Harvard is part of the Research Collections and Preservation Consortium (ReCAP), and the Ivy Plus Libraries Confederation, making over 90 million books available to the Library's users. The Library is open to current Harvard affiliates, and some events and spaces are open to the public. The most recognized building in the Harvard Library system is Widener Library, situated in Harvard Yard."

Harvard is perhaps best-known because of its enduring history of innovation in education. But even die-hard Harvard buffs are not likely to know all of these Harvard firsts and historical snippets.

Year

Description

1607

John Harvard, the College's future namesake and first benefactor, was baptized at St. Saviour's Church (now Southwark Cathedral), London.

1635

John Harvard received his M.A. from Cambridge University, England.

1636

First College in American colonies founded. The "Great and General Court of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England" approves £400 for the establishment of "a schoale or colledge" later to be called "Harvard."

1637

The Great and General Court orders the "colledge" established one year earlier to be located at Newetowne (renamed "Cambrige" in 1638).

Late 1637 or early 1638

The Overseers purchased the College's first piece of real estate: a house and an acre of land from Goodman Peyntree. Located on the southern edge of "Cow-yard Row" and soon distinguished as the "College Yard," this tract became the nucleus of present-day Harvard Yard and remains at the southern end of the Old Yard (the area west of Thayer, University, and Weld halls).

1638

John Harvard wills his library (400 books) and half his estate to the College.

1639

In recognition of John Harvard's bequest, the Great and General Court orders "that the colledge agreed upon formerly to bee built at Cambridg shalbee called Harvard Colledge."

1640

Reverend Henry Dunster is appointed first president of Harvard.

1642

First Harvard Commencement with nine graduates.

1649

The Town of Cambridge and President Henry Dunster give Harvard the "College Farm" at Billerica, Mass., which paid annual rent to the College until the farm was sold in 1775.

1650

Harvard granted Charter, still in effect today (with 2010 amendments).

1653

John Sassamon, a Massachuset Indian, became the first known Native American to study at Harvard (probably for a term or so). A disciple of Indian Bible translator John Eliot, Sassamon later became a scribe and interpreter to Wampanoag Chief Metacom (a.k.a. Metacomet, Pometacom, King Philip). In 1675, Sassamon was murdered as an English informant, touching off King Philip's War, New England's most devastating conflict between Natives and newcomers.

1692

Increase Mather awarded Harvard's first Doctor of Divinity degree.

1755

John Adams, future U.S. president, graduates.

1764

Original Harvard Hall burns, destroying some 5,000 volumes and all but one of John Harvard's books.

1775

Continental soldiers are quartered in Harvard buildings.

1776

Eight Harvard alumni sign the Declaration of Independence.

1780

The Massachusetts Constitution went into effect and officially recognized Harvard as a university. The first medical instruction given to Harvard students in 1781 and the founding of the Medical School in 1782 made it a university in fact as well as name.

1781

Oldest continuous chapter of Phi Beta Kappa formed at Harvard.

1782

Twenty-nine-year-old John Warren was appointed Professor of Anatomy and Surgery at the Medical School. During the previous year while head of the army hospital in Boston, he had given Harvard students their first formal medical instruction. Benjamin Waterhouse was named to a second Medical School professorship, in the "Theory and Practice of Physic."

1783

With high ceremony, Harvard Medical School officially opened as the "Medical Institution of Harvard University." Its first home was the ever-versatile Holden Chapel.

1787

John Quincy Adams, future U.S. president, graduates.

1791

A writer in the Boston press accused Harvard of poisoning students' minds with Edward Gibbon's monumental History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776-88).

President Joseph Willard replied that far from even considering Gibbon, the College used a text by French historian Abbé Millot. Nathaniel Ames, who left Harvard around 1812, recalled Millot's as "the most utterly worthless and contemptible work of that kind or any other extant."

1810

John Thornton Kirkland begins 18-year presidency.

1815

University Hall is completed.

1816

The Divinity School is established.

1817

Harvard Law School is established (first reference to law school is Dane hall, 1832 in Harvard.edu list).

1829

Josiah Quincy begins his 16-year presidency.

1832

Dane Hall, the Law School's first new building, was formally dedicated in Harvard Yard and served for more than half a century thereafter.

1836

Harvard Bicentennial.

1836

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow appointed professor.

1837

Ralph Waldo Emerson '21 delivers Phi Beta Kappa oration.

1839

Harvard Observatory is founded.

1845

Rutherford B. Hayes, future U.S. president, graduates from the Law School.

1846

John Collins Warren, Medical School professor, conducts first public demonstration of ether as surgical anesthetic.

1848

Louis Agassiz appointed professor of zoology and geography.

1849

Dr. George Parkman disappeared at the Medical School in one of the most famous murder cases in Harvard history. Earlier, Parkman had lent money to colleague Dr. John White Webster. To secure the loan, Webster gave Parkman a mortgage on his personal property, including a valuable collection of minerals. When Parkman learned that Webster had backed another loan with the same collection, he began relentlessly pursuing Webster to collect the debt. A week after the disappearance, a suspicious janitor broke through a brick vault below Webster's lab and found human body parts, which the authorities soon discovered all around the lab. Found guilty of first-degree murder, Webster belatedly confessed and appealed for clemency, but was hanged on Aug. 30, 1850. Parkman's widow led a fund drive to support Webster's wife and children.

1852

Harvard wins first intercollegiate sports event, a boat race against Yale on Lake Winnepesaukee.

1854

Henry David Thoreau '37 publishes *Walden*.

1855

Holworthy Hall gets first gas lights in the Yard.

1862

The Overseers confirmed the Rev. Thomas Hill, Class of 1843, as Harvard's 20th President. His brief tenure brought higher admissions standards, a series of public "University Lectures" (est. 1863) by distinguished Harvard and non-Harvard scholars that paved the way for the "Graduate School of Arts and Sciences" and University Extension, and progress toward a system of elective courses. Hill also conducted nationwide searches for new faculty appointees.

1865

Election of Overseers placed in the hands of alumni, severing legal ties with the Commonwealth.

1867

The Harvard Dental School made its first appointments: Daniel Harwood, professor of dental pathology and therapeutics; and Nathan Cooley Keep, professor of mechanical dentistry.

1869

At the meetinghouse of First Church, Unitarian, Charles William Eliot was formally installed as Harvard's 21st President. From the outset, Eliot's 105-minute address delineated his broad educational purposes: "The endless controversies whether language, philosophy, mathematics, or science supplies the best mental training, whether general education should be chiefly literary or chiefly scientific, have no practical lesson for us to-day. This University recognizes no real antagonism between literature and science, and consents to no such narrow alternatives as mathematics or classics, science or metaphysics. We would have them all, and at their best."

1870

The Rev. Phillips Brooks laid the cornerstone of Memorial Hall.

1872

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences is founded.

1872

Arnold Arboretum is established.

1873

Charles Sprague Sargent officially began a 54-year term as first director of the Arnold Arboretum (est. 1872). Sargent soon enlisted the aid of pioneering landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted – then busy designing the Boston park system – to help him lay out the grounds. "Olmsted immediately grasped the idea that an arboretum where the public could see varied plantations of rare and exotic trees and shrubs skilfully [sic] selected, artistically arranged, and grown under scientific oversight, would not only be an appropriate feature in the park system [now known as Boston's "Emerald Necklace"] but might well become its culminating attraction," Benjamin Lincoln Robinson, the Asa Gray Professor of Systematic Botany, wrote in the late 1920s. Nonetheless, the Arboretum proved a hard sell, Robinson noted. "Neither the City [of Boston] nor the Harvard

Corporation welcomed the idea. The press was indifferent, and the public apathetic. Nine years of persistent effort were required before it was possible to draft a plan of procedure acceptable both to the City and to the University and to secure its approval by the General Court of Massachusetts."

1874

Department of Fine Arts is established.

1875

New Haven, Conn., hosted the first Harvard-Yale football game, which Harvard won, to the delight of some 150 student boosters from Cambridge.

1879

The Harvard Annex, later known as Radcliffe College, opens with 27 female students.

1880

Theodore Roosevelt makes Phi Beta Kappa.

1886

250th anniversary celebrated with more than 2,500 alumni and friends with President Grover Cleveland in attendance.

1890

Land given by Major Henry Lee Higginson '55 dedicated as Soldiers Field, honoring alumni who died in the Civil War.

1894

Radcliffe College is incorporated.

1896

Fogg Art Museum opens.

1901

First course offered in landscape architecture and city planning.

1903

Franklin D. Roosevelt elected president of the Harvard Crimson

1903

Country's first concrete football stadium is built.

1904

FDR graduates.

1908

With 59 students, the Graduate School of Business Administration formally opened as a Graduate Department of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Through this initial connection to established departments, President Eliot and Dean Edwin Francis Gay hoped to get the newcomer off to a well-supported start. Other U.S. universities began offering business training as early as 1886, but the course of study was overwhelmingly undergraduate. In seeking to establish business as a profession, Harvard Business School became the country's first business program limited to college graduates. By the end of the first academic year, the School had 80 students (regular and special) from 14 colleges and 12 states.

1909

Abbott Lawrence Lowell begins his 24-year presidency.

1910

President Lowell establishes Commission on Extension Courses, now the Harvard Extension School.

1910

Theodore Roosevelt, Class of 1880, served as the 34th president of the Harvard Alumni Association (est. 1840).

1913

School of Public Health is established.

1913

Harvard University Press is established.

1914

Professor Theodore William Richards wins Nobel Prize in Chemistry for determination of atomic weights; he is the first of 28 Harvard Nobel laureates.

1914

Henry Cabot Lodge, Class of 1871, served as the 38th president of the Harvard Alumni Association (est. 1840).

1915

Widener Library opens.

1920

The College Library contained about 1,127,500 volumes.

1920

The Business School issued Marketing Problems, its first case book, developed by Marketing Professor Melvin Thomas Copeland.

1920

Graduate School of Education is established.

1924

The Harvard-Boston (Egyptian) Expedition began excavation of the royal cemetery of King Cheops (Khufu) near the Great Pyramid and soon identified the tombs of Prince Kawa'ab (Cheops's eldest son), four other princes, Princess Meresankh II, and two pyramid priests.

1926

Samuel Eliot Morison is appointed official historian for Tercentenary.

1928

First "iron lung" is devised by two doctors at the School of Public Health.

1930

The House Plan is established with the opening of Dunster House and Lowell House.

1933

James Bryant Conant begins his 20-year presidency.

1936

Harvard's Tercentenary Celebration with President Franklin D. Roosevelt in attendance.

1936

Graduate School of Design is established.

1936

Graduate School of Public Administration is established.

1939

Walter Gropius, founder of Bauhaus, becomes head of architecture at Graduate School of Design.

1940

John F. Kennedy graduates.

1943

Two hundred Army Quartermaster officers arrived at the Business School for a three-month intensive course in business methods. They formed a new unit of lieutenants and captains known as the Army Supply Officers' Training School, a counterpart to the Navy Supply Corps School.

1943

The Harvard Alumni Bulletin tally of Harvard men in active military service equaled "the mythical 10,000 men of Harvard." Seventy-eight Harvard men had been killed in the line of duty, 20 were missing in action, and another 20 were prisoners of war.

1944

IBM Mark I computer begins operation at Harvard.

1945

Publication of President Conant's General Education in a Free Society; its recommendation will have wide influence.

1945

At the Kaiser Shipyard in Richmond, Calif., the 10,800-ton SS Harvard Victory was launched as the first of a new series of U.S. Maritime Commission ships named after U.S. educational institutions. The Harvard Corporation later voted to give the ship a library of about 140 volumes selected by the American Merchant Marine Library Association. A simple plaque acknowledged the University's gift.

1947

General George C. Marshall receives honorary degree: announces "Marshall Plan" at commencement.

1953

Nathan M. Pusey begins his 18-year presidency.

1955

Helen Keller is the first woman to receive Harvard honorary degree.

1956

Pusey announces major fund drive, the Program for Harvard College.

1956

Memorial Hall tower burns down.

1959

Fidel Castro is guest of Law School Forum.

1960

Mary I. Bunting establishes Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study.

1960

Loeb Drama Center opens.

1963

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, designed by Le Corbusier, opens.

1968

Kennedy School of Government begins its Public Policy Program.

1969

Harvard Community Health plan begins serving patients.

1969

Student strike and takeover of University Hall.

1970

Helen H. Gilbert elected first woman member of the Board of Overseers.

1971

Derek C. Bok begins his 20-year presidency.

1974

President Bok and FAS Dean Henry Rosovsky launch study teaching and curriculum in the College.

1975

George W. Bush, future U.S. president, graduates from Business School.

1975

Equal admissions policy for male and female undergraduates is adopted.

1978

Core curriculum adopted.

1979

President Bok announces the Harvard Campaign, the largest capital campaign in Harvard's history.

1980

American Repertory Theater comes to Harvard.

1982

Semitic Museum, closed for 40 years, is reopened.

1983

Democratic presidential candidates debate nuclear arms control at the Kennedy School.

1984

Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Sackler Museums combine to become the Harvard Art Museums.

1986

Harvard celebrates its 350th anniversary.

1991

Barack Obama, future U.S. president, graduates from the Law School.

1991

Neil Rudenstine is appointed president of Harvard.

1992

Harvard Kennedy School Forum hosts Mikhail Gorbachev.

1994

Harvard Business Publishing is founded.

1995

New cholera vaccine developed at Harvard Medical School.

1997

Mary Fasano became the oldest person ever to earn a Harvard degree when she graduated from the Extension School at the age of 89.

1998

Nelson Mandela awarded honorary degree at special convocation.

1999

Radcliffe College merges with Harvard College.

2001

Lawrence Summers is appointed president.

2001

On the eve of the 350th Commencement, Harvard's four living Presidents—past, present, and future—gather for a group portrait in Loeb House.

2002

Former Astronomy Prof. Riccardo Giacconi shares half the Nobel Prize in Physics for pioneering work in astrophysics that led to the discovery of cosmic X-ray sources.

2004

Harvard Financial Aid Initiative is launched.

2007

School of Engineering and Applied Sciences is established.

2007

Drew Gilpin Faust begins duties as Harvard's 28th President. She is the first woman to hold the position.

2009

Unified University-wide calendar is launched.

2010

The Harvard Corporation expands from 7 to 13 members.

2010

Harvard University will welcome ROTC back to campus now that Congress has repealed a ban on gays and lesbians serving openly in the military.

2011

Harvard University awards degree to Native American student who died in 1665 just before Commencement.

2011

Harvard celebrates its 375th anniversary.

2012

MIT and Harvard announce EdX.

2012

Harvard announces plans to renew the University's 12 undergraduate houses.

2012

Harvard releases first University-wide Sustainability Impact Report.

2013

President Drew Faust launches The Harvard Campaign, the largest ever in higher education.

2013

Financial aid increases by \$10M, bringing the total to a record \$182 million.

2014

Kenneth Griffin '89 makes \$150 million gift to Harvard College, principally focused on supporting Harvard's financial aid program.

2014

A \$350 million gift comes from The Morningside Foundation, established by the family of the late T.H. Chan. The gift renames the Harvard School of Public Health to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

2015

John A. Paulson, M.B.A. '80 made the largest gift in the University's history, a \$400 million endowment to support the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS). The School is renamed the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

2018

Lawrence S. Bacow is appointed president of Harvard.

Harvard is the oldest institution of higher education in the United States, established in 1636 by vote of the Great and General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It was named after the College's first benefactor, the young minister John Harvard of Charlestown, who upon his death in 1638 left his library and half his estate to the institution. A statue of John Harvard stands today in front of University Hall in Harvard Yard, and is perhaps the University's best known landmark.

[View of list of historical facts](#)

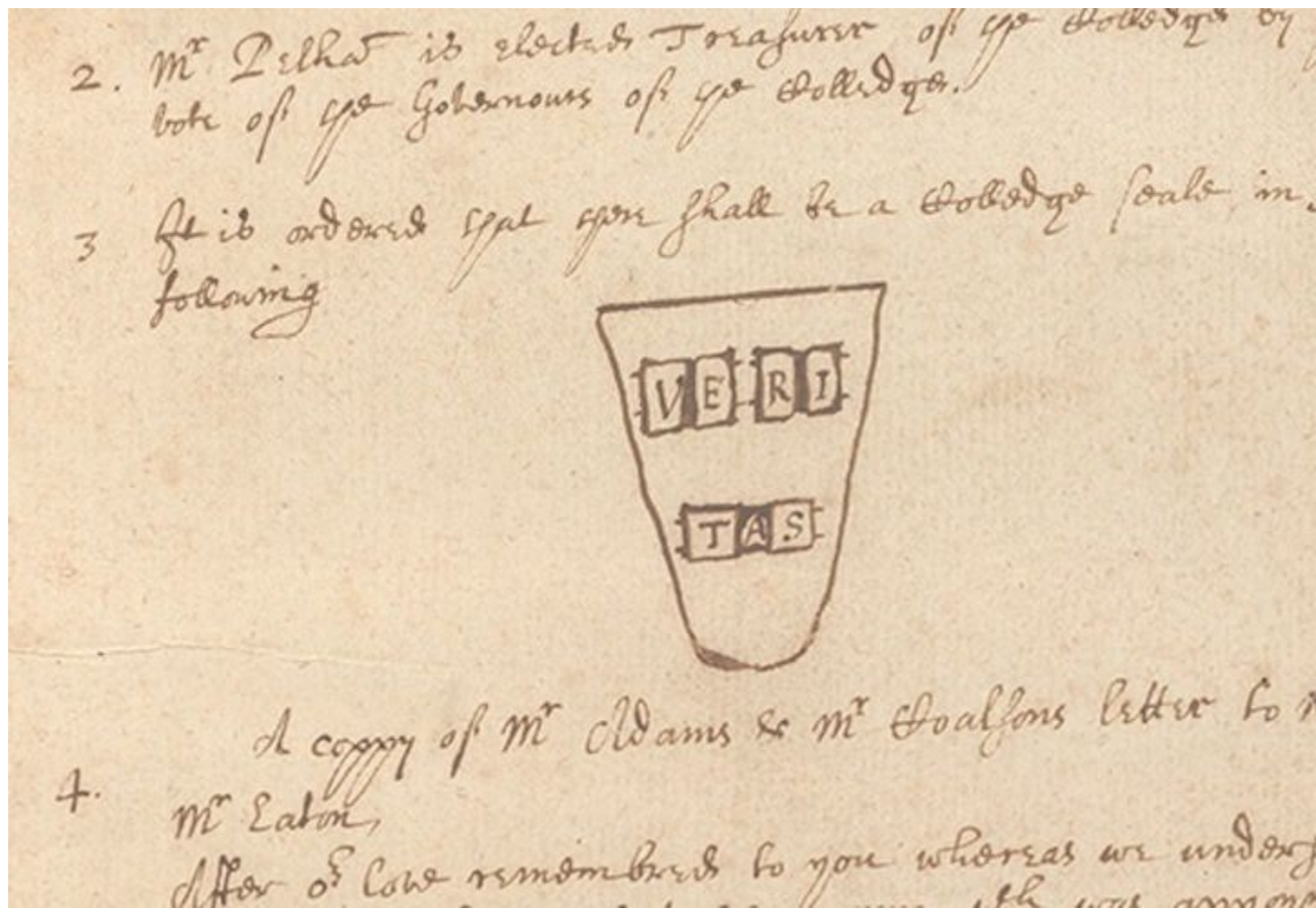
Harvard University has 12 degree-granting Schools in addition to the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. The University has grown from nine students with a single master to an enrollment of more than 20,000 degree candidates including undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. There are more than 360,000 living [alumni](#) in the U.S. and over 190 other countries.

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The Harvard Shield

On Sept. 8, 1836, at Harvard's Bicentennial celebration, it was announced that President Josiah Quincy had found the [first rough sketch](#) of the College arms – a shield with the Latin motto “VERITAS” (“Verity” or “Truth”) on three books – while researching his History of Harvard University in the College Archives. During the Bicentennial, a white banner atop a large tent in the Yard publicly displayed this design for the first time.



Until Quincy's discovery, the hand-drawn sketch (from records of an Overseers meeting on Jan. 6, 1644) had been filed away and forgotten. It became the basis of the seal officially adopted by the Corporation in 1843 and still informs the version used today.

Harvard University Shields





Why Crimson?

Crimson was officially designated as Harvard's color by a vote of the Harvard Corporation in 1910. But why crimson? A pair of rowers, Charles W. Eliot, Class of 1853, and Benjamin W. Crowninshield, Class of 1858, provided crimson scarves to their teammates so that spectators could differentiate Harvard's crew team from other teams during a regatta in 1858. Eliot became Harvard's 21st president in 1869 and served until 1909; the Corporation vote to make the color of Eliot's bandannas the official color came soon after he stepped down.

But before the official vote by the Harvard Corporation, students' color of choice had at one point wavered between crimson and magenta – probably because the idea of using colors to represent universities was still new in the latter part of the 19th century. Pushed by popular debate to decide, Harvard undergraduates held a plebiscite on May 6, 1875, on the University's color, and crimson won by a wide margin. The student newspaper – which had been called *The Magenta* – changed its name with the very next issue.

U.S. Presidents and Honorary Degrees

After George Washington's Continental Army forced the British to leave Boston in March 1776, the Harvard Corporation and Overseers voted on April 3, 1776, to confer an honorary degree upon the general, who accepted it that very day (probably at his Cambridge headquarters in Craigie House). Washington next visited Harvard in 1789, as the first U.S. president.

Other U.S. presidents to receive an honorary degree include:

- 1781 John Adams
- 1787 Thomas Jefferson
- 1822 John Quincy Adams
- 1833 Andrew Jackson
- 1872 Ulysses S. Grant
- 1905 William Howard Taft
- 1907 Woodrow Wilson
- 1917 Herbert Hoover
- 1919 Theodore Roosevelt
- 1929 Franklin Delano Roosevelt
- 1946 Dwight Eisenhower
- 1956 John F. Kennedy
- 2014 George H.W. Bush

